



TO: Governor Kate Brown
FROM: The Coalition of Oregon Professional Associations for Counseling and Therapy (COPACT)
DATE: March 18, 2020
SUBJECT: Supporting Access to Mental Health Care in the Wake of the COVID-19 Pandemic

Dear Joint Special Committee on Coronavirus Response,

The Coalition of Professional Associations of Counselors and Therapists (COPACT) advocates for the 6000 Licensed Professional Counselors (LPCs), Marriage Family Therapists (LMFTs), and Registered Interns and for *all Oregonians* in need of mental health care. We are the first responders providing clinical mental health treatment through our work in agencies, universities, corrections, health clinics, rehabilitation and private psychotherapy practices.

On behalf of all LPCs and LMFTs in Oregon and our clients, **we are requesting that immediate emergency rules be enacted to ensure access to mental health care for all Oregonians during this COVID 19 crisis.** We believe this can be accomplished by enacting the following measures:

- **Require that all insurance providers in Oregon cover Telemental Health sessions, and at the same reimbursement rate as in-person sessions, including psychological assessments for new clients.**
- For those clients and/or providers in rural areas, or those who do not otherwise have access to the equipment and services needed for video sessions: **Require that all insurance providers in Oregon cover telephone-only sessions, and at the same reimbursement rate as in-person sessions, including psychological assessments for new clients.**
- **Require that supervisors of counselor interns be allowed to use Telehealth exclusively to meet with supervisees,** in order to increase the number of providers available for services to all Oregonians (at this time, only a portion of supervision hours are allowed via Telehealth and OBLPCT has, so far, denied our requests to change the rules)
- **Require that the state licensing boards in Oregon and Washington allow Telehealth to take place across state lines.** There are many counselors who live in Washington but practice in Oregon and vice versa. Relaxing the licensing laws for the duration of the emergency would ensure that clients are able to continue therapy with their established counselor. It also increases the number of counselors and therapists not affected by the virus to treat clients in areas that are more heavily affected.

On March 14th, Ohio Governor Mike DeWine enacted similar emergency Telemental Health measures and yesterday, March 17th, Cigna Behavioral Health announced that they are making multiple special considerations, including waiving and/or loosening state-specific licensing requirements for the delivery of telehealth, in order to accommodate individuals who have been displaced.

COPACT has been doing its part to respond quickly to this emergency by providing information to our members on how best to safely access their patients, including a list of HIPAA compliant Telemental Health platforms available at no charge to the provider, as well as free and low-cost trainings on the ethical considerations of Telemental Health. Still, counselors and therapists in Oregon continue to put themselves at risk by meeting with clients, many of whom are newly isolated from family and community supports, unable to work and quickly losing hope. Commercial insurance companies have offered limited, confusing and at times, contradictory information as to what they will and will not cover in regard to Telemental Health, yet many providers have implemented Telemental Health sessions, despite the fact that they may not be paid, in order to protect their clients and the community at large.

This is an unprecedented emergency that calls for a quick response. We need to do all that we can to ensure Oregonians are protected, both physically and emotionally. On behalf of the thousands of counselors and therapists across Oregon, COPACT thanks you for your urgent action on this matter.